

Listening to music can improve unconscious attitudes towards other cultures

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Fatoumata Diawara's music was used in the research. Credit: Zoe Klinck

Listening to five minutes of West African or Indian pop music can give the listener more positive attitudes towards those cultures, research from the Universities of Oxford and Exeter has found.

Research had previously shown that making [music](#) can foster affiliation and cooperation among participants, but this study shows that even listening to music can improve someone's unconscious attitudes towards other cultural groups.

Music psychologists Professor Eric Clarke and Dr Jonna Vuoskoski from the University of Oxford and sociologist of music Professor Tia DeNora from the University of Exeter used a method called the Implicit Association Test to measure the change in listeners' unconscious cultural bias after listening to a single track of West African or Indian pop music.

They found a shift in [positive feelings](#) towards the target culture – though not all listeners were equally affected by the music: people with an empathic personality were more susceptible to the effects of music, while those who scored low in empathy remained unaffected.

'Music performs a whole range of psychological and social functions, bringing people together in powerful ways, and shaping people's emotions and behaviours,' said Professor Eric Clarke of the Music Faculty at Oxford University.

'And it's important to recognize that music can also be very divisive. But at a time of increasing nationalism and isolationism, the findings of our study provide encouraging evidence for music's capacity to increase cultural understanding.

'Music is no 'magic bullet' that automatically overcomes barriers and brings people together; a degree of openness and empathy is also required,' added Dr Jonna Vuoskoski.

More information: Jonna K. Vuoskoski et al. Music listening evokes implicit affiliation, *Psychology of Music* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0305735616680289](https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735616680289)

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